

## [Los Comanches]

1

1

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"LOS COMANCHES"

"Si Senor, if my daughter had not put iodine in my eye in place of the medicine given me by the doctor I would be out with my sons helping them plow".

These were the first remarks from Sr. Vicente Romero of Cordova after we had exchanged salutations and I had commented on his good health. After a lapse of several years I had found my old friend partially blinded due to his daughter's unfortunate mistake.

"And for the grace of God who has given me my good health and the company of my wife I give thanks. Fifty-seven years have gone thru this life together. I was married quite old, when I had thirty years. I have lived a very active life and it is hard for me to be sitting here by the fire-place so useless." Around him were eight grand-children, just a fraction of the twenty-six he has, not counting great grand-children.

"Not always have I been so helpless. If I do say so myself I have never been afraid to work or to risk my life to acquire the necessities of life for my family. And when I was young we were surrounded by so many savage nations that any trip away from the village had to be made in force. Four times I have been on trading trips to the Comanches and three times to the plains on buffalo hunts. We used bows and arrows and the lance as weapons when hunting at first. Later we were able to trade fpr gims at Samta Fe. We would take venison

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and fish and other things to trade in Santa Fe. There were many deer then and the rivers were full of fish. But everthing comes to an end in this world. C. [15?] - [??]

"The first two trips to the Comanches I went with my uncle Guadalupe Marquez, who was the commandante or leader. I learned enough of the language and customs so that the last two trips I went as commandante. Our first trip took us about three months. We took salt, blankets and strips of iron for arrow-heads. We also took big packs of a very hard bread, which our wives baked especially for trading to the 2 Indians. Another article of trade was dried apples and plums.

We went by way of Penasco and Mora. When we came close to Fort Union we would wait until night to slip by the Fort. The Americans did not want us to go into the Comanche country because it might cause trouble. After we had gotten by the Fort without being seen we would have to hunt for the Indians. These savages were always traveling, hunting or following the buffalo herds, so that we never knew where we would find them. We went here and there over the plains looking for signs of the Indians. When we finally found the trail of a large group, in which there were signs of women and children, we knew we were close. Following this trail until the sign was quite fresh, our commandante ordered us to make camp. Locating the closest water supply we started to unpack. While we were doing this our commandante made a smoke signal on a high point-near camp.

"Now boys, in the morning we should have the Indians here and we can start to trade, he said, 'Be very careful how you act with the Indians.'

"We did not sleep very much that night. In the morning we were surrounded by a large group. They made camp next to us, the women doing all the work. The children and the dogs made lots of noise. At first the children were afraid of us but after a few days became very friendly, always begging for something. The Comanches are a very fine looking Indian, light complexioned and well built. There are many savage nations on those plains. On one trip we traded with a group of Kiowas. It is a good thing the government guards

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these savages because if they ever fought us all together they might kill us all off now that they can get good rifles.

"After a sort of feast with the Indians we started in to trade. This would take a long time because there would be much talk over each trade. Sometimes an Indian and one of us would fix up a horse race. They liked to bet and that way we won many articles from them. We did not stay in the same camp but traveled from spot to spot with our customers, following the buffalo trading as we went. I enjoyed this life very much. It was very new to me, we were always watchful and on our guard for some act of treachery on the part of the Indians. But they had need of the goods we had to trade so they treated a trading party with a certain regard and usually avoided any act which might cause trouble. We were more careful than they were perhaps, always thinking of our families and the goods we were to take home with us. The younger men in our "escuadra" would run foot races with the Indians and amuse ourselves in other ways, such as breaking horses and contests with the bow and arrow. We had wrestling matches in some of which I took part. I very often raced a "grullo" (dark gray, with a black stripe down his back and on each shoulder), which was favorite hunting horse with first one and then another of their horses. I won six out of about nine races and not being held back by thoughts of a wife and children at home, bet many blankets and other articles and so added considerably to my store of goods, because my grullo was pretty fast. Another young fellow, Anacleto Mascarenas, two years older than myself (remember I had only eighteen years), almost brought calamity on our little "escuadra" (troop or gang.)

"For some time several of our group had had conversation with a young girl of the tribe, who had been taken captive from some place in Texas, San Antonio del Arbol she called the place. Where that place is I don't know. She had tried to persuade us to take her away from her captors, promising us that her father would pay us in gold and cattle, should we return her to her home. Her story was that the Comanches had seized her as she was taking some clothes to some servant women washing at a stream near the house. As she was passing a clump of wild plum bushes three of these painted savages had jumped

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out, took hold of her, one of them closing her mouth with his hand to keep her from crying out or screaming. They led her to where they had left their horses. One of them took her on his horse and rode off, followed by the other two. A short distance from her father's ranch they were joined by others in charge of stolen stock, also belonging to her father. She was shown the mutilated bodies of two of her father's herders and by sign showed her what to expect if she did not go quietly. One of the men who had carried her off had made her his wife. Pobrecita! She had to work very hard like the rest of the Indian women. Her pleas were very pitiful and some of us younger fellows felt like risking a rescue.

"In every important decision our commandante's word was final because we had intrusted ourselves to his care and given him full authority. Some of us took up the girl's case with him for his decision. We could almost guess what his decision would be. There were two of us who did not care so much about the gold or reward from her father, but had dreams of taking this really "muy bonito" captive as a bride, and enjoying the surprise she would cause when our folks saw her after the Salvo to San Antonio. It was the custom for any group returning to Cordova from a hunt or trading trip, to discharge their fire-arms at the crest of the ridge circling our home village. This salvo was in honor of our patron saint of the village and was a means of announcing our arrival. Those were very joyous times and I will never forget the first time I belonged to one of these returning parties. But let me finish telling you about this girl. I was one of two who wanted to take the girl back with us, but our commandante said, No, it can't be done. Any effort to free her or take her away might destroy our whole party, as far away as we are from home and as few as we are for the number of Indians against us. Even if we were so 5 lucky as to get her away with little or no loss none of us could ever return to trade with these Indians. But Mascarenas insisted and threatened to carry her away against the commandante's orders. He secretly made preparations to do so. When the commandante found this out he ordered Mascarenas seized and bound until he gave up his plan and promised to obey our leader's orders in everything. This seemed very cruel, but it was very necessary for the

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good of our whole party. So the Pobrecita stayed there with the Indians, perhaps for life. Asi le toco' (That was her fate). Those were very hard times.

"I remember now something that happened on my last trading trip with the Comanches. Among our party was Jose Antonio Vigil and his son. This man was later known as El Capitan Vigil. He was afraid of no Indian or twenty of them even. I could tell of many deeds of valor of his against the savages, but now I will tell you of what happened on my last trip. I was in charge as commandante and our whole group was composed of men from Cordova or El Valle. This man Vigil had a very fast and enduring sorrel horse which was known as El Alazan. The Indians coveted this animal and Vigil recieved many offers for his horse. One Indian even offered him two captive women amongst other things. This was a good offer, for these captive slaves were very much in demand among the "ricos" and prospective bride-grooms and brought a very good price. But Vigil refused all trades because he could not bear to part with this very excellent animal.

Early one morning Vigil and his son left camp after antelope without my permission. He was very far from camp when he and his boy were overtaken by an Indian known as "Capitan Corona. This Capitan Corona was so called because of the peculiar way his hair grew. At one time in some fight his enemies had started to scalp him while unconscious, thinking him dead. The operation revived him before his scalp had completely parted company with his skull. Being a renowned fighter he had scattered his would be scalpers. However his scalp did not fit back snug to his skull like it had been before. It had grown back in a bunch on the top of his head making a crown-like growth. And that was the reason for his name, Corono meaning crown. At any rate he was a very tricky Indian and a fighter with a reputation, being a chief amongst the Comanches. This day he hailed Vigil and his son and catching up with them rode along between them. Being as eager as any of the other for Vigil's horse he started talking trade as they rode along. Jose Antonio being always on his guard pretended to agree to trade so as to keep Corona in good humor. The tricky savage decided to get the horse for nothing because without warning he knocked the boy off his horse with a club which he carried in his left hand. At the same time he

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reached over with his right hand and pulled Vigil off his horse with his right hand. All this was done very suddenly. However he was not quick enough for Vigil, who at the instant drew his knife. Catching Corona in the pit of the throat he ripped him open completely disemboweling him.

His first thought was of the trouble he might cause the rest of his companions. Putting the body on the Indian pony they covered any marks of the fight, buried the body quite a way from the scene of the fight. His horse was taken to the edge of a cliff where he also was killed and his body pushed over the edge. Riding back to camp late that night I was awakened and told what had happened. Vigil after telling of the fight said, 'I have brought this trouble on us myself. My boy and I will leave tonight. The Indians missing us will think that Corona has taken us captive. If you folks make no fuss the Indians will believe as I have told you. As soon as you finish trading you had better leave because they might accidentally find the body. I leave all my goods in your care to take to my family in case I do not get home. But I will not stay, and make trouble for the rest of you. This is the only way. Adios amigos. 'Vayan con Dios', I answered.

"There was no doubt that everything was for the best this way. Luckily it rained very heavily that night covering their tracks and the Indians were suspicious 7 they finally must have believed as Vigil that they would when Corona failed to show up also. This was another time when one or two individuals suffered in order to preserve the safety of the many. I am glad to say that Vigil and his boy arrived safely home after many narrow escapes from the Indians and from hunger.

Jose Antonio lived to found Cundiyo, settling it along with his sons and their families. His descendants and the descendants of his eight sons were the reason that in Cundiyo today the only family name you hear is Vigil. Here in the defense of Cundiyo from Indian raiding parties Jose Antonio received the name of El Capitan Vigil. The Indians learned to leave him alone after he had killed several of them and Cundiyo was fairly safe from their raids.

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One time I remember Capitan Vigil was taken to Santa Fe to show how he fought against the Indians. With his body wrapped around with a raw-hide rope and with his shield he kept off the arrows which were shot at him. I think it was the captain of the American soldiers at Santa Fe who took him there for this exhibition. I do know that he came home with a team of mules and as he said with \$300. American money. "He was a very valiant man; very famous for his valiant deeds."

"After finishing with our trading we made preparations to leave the Comanche country. The Indians escorted us for three days out of their country. They did this with all trading parties when the trading was over. After again slipping by Fort Union we were very happy to be on our way home. We were still in some danger from Apaches or Navajos who liked to come thru that part of the country to raid the pueblos and even on horse stealing trips among the Comanches. The Comanches were very great enemies of the Navajos. One Comanche told me that the Navajos were all magicians or practised witchcraft. To prove this he said that whenever they were about to overtake a bunch of horse thieving Navajos they would turn themselves and and the stolen stock into soap weeds and they would have to return empty handed. That is why they had no use for the Navajos.

8

"The closer we got to our homes the more we pushed our poor horses with their loads. And, thanks to God, we finally reached Truchas and now we were practically home. Soon we were firing our fire-arms in the Salvo to San Antonio. We could see the people on the roof-tops counting us as we rode down into the village to see who were missing. My poor mother cried with joy to see me back safe. The next few days were filled with feasting and the nights with dancing. Blessed be God; those were the times. This was my first trip to the Comanches and I was to make many more, but I always remember this one especially."

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